

March 19, 2004

To: Gary Garlock, Program Director
Sue Dow, Executive Director
Thomas McKenna, Board Chair Person

From: Suzn Gehring, Quality Improvement Specialist
Developmental Disabilities Program

Subject: Comprehensive Evaluation of STEP's Child and Family Services

I want to thank all staff for their cooperation and assistance with this review. I reviewed and visited with a random sample of three families each in Part C, Family Education and Support, and Intensive Services during the months of December, January and February 2003/2004 to verify that contract and federal guidelines are being met as well as to gather family perspectives about STEP's services. I found good compliance with the state and federal requirements for all your family services! And more importantly, families reported satisfaction with STEP's services and their FSS!

HOME VISITS

I observed services being provided to families that are individualized to meet each family's unique needs. Across diverse settings and cultures, families and staff showed me that they had developed wonderful collaboration.

Families had many very positive things to say about the benefits of the services they are receiving from STEP. Some of their comments are paraphrased as follows:

Intensive Services

We don't know what we would do without the FSS's help and ideas about activities. The FSS is also helping us with referral to adult services.

We feel really blest with the good services our son is receiving - he has a really good team of people helping him grow. STEP helped us get some adaptive equipment. STEP has made a huge difference for my son's entire life - he started with their Part C services, then

we went to full, we moved to Billings and now we have intensive services. The early intervention services were so important for our family. They prepared us and lead us in the right direction. STEP is a very good organization.

STEP is a good listener; I can call at any time and she is always there for us. She shows us different positioning. The FSS is a good helper and goes above and beyond to help us out. She helps us with everything and the whole family. I like their services and feel that they are good services. The services help me.

Part C Services

The FSS helped us with sign language - now my daughter is signing more. STEP helped me to focus on what to do. I really think early intervention is important; we will be ahead of the game because of it. The kids that don't get identified until school will have a lot harder time.

STEP gives me support and information. When I ask questions they will find the answers for me. They helped me get a speech therapist. My FSS is aggressive and really works hard. My son was picked up and started service right away.

Full Services

We have been pleased with all the FSSes we have worked with over the last 9 years. They have all been very knowledgeable and helpful. They have gone out of their way to work with our entire family. They have helped us with referrals to doctors and specialists. One FSS would bring us batteries and information about our daughter's condition. We also really appreciate the respite home that we can use when we come into Billings for medical appointments, surgeries, etc.

We are not able to find respite providers here that are willing to use the new respite payment system - they don't care for all the paper work and want to be paid immediately. We feel that the FSSes working in rural areas should be given more support. We would like to see picnics or sib day events in our area. I wish their computers were IBM compatible and I would like to see more learning software available in the lending library.

STEP is good with helping us with other agencies. Years ago there was a problem and they just stopped coming, I will now call if I have any problems. Now they give us lots of information and help us with problems at school. It helps me to know that I have support when there are problems at school. The FSS has helped us with environmental modifications for behavior issues.

I am very thankful for the help STEP gives me on behaviors at both home and the school. The FSS's behavioral skills are a good match with my son's needs. They give me knowledge and information that I can apply to see if it will work for me. I appreciate that STEP is so open to listening to my ideas, not just their ideas. My FSS really values my time and takes care of stuff for me really quickly. I like that my FSS is so straightforward; I wish I could have more time with her. They are also helping get my son referred and ready for adult services.

SPECIFIC REVIEW COMPONENTS

The families that I talked to verified that STEP coordinates and cooperated with other services agencies on behalf of the child and family. The families verified that IFSPs are reviewed every six months and rewritten annually. Several families reported that modifications are made as needed to the IFSP. Families were clear that they had the final say on all aspects of service. Written notices were usually available for IFSP meetings (3 out of 4 were present.) Families verified that services identified in the IFSP were implemented and that there were not gaps in the implementation. Families are informed of the process to work out complaints or appeals for issues relating to eligibility, screening or IFSPs.

Families have access to their records and felt that their records were secure so that confidentiality is protected. They expressed comfort with the understandability of how information is presented. Everyone knew that participation in services is voluntary.

All families assisted in choosing ancillary service providers, as well as hab aides and respite providers. STEP is very aware of other service options available to children and assists families in accessing these so that IFES services are truly the payer of last resort.

Children who were not found to be eligible were referred to other agencies as appropriate. Waiting lists are submitted monthly to the regional offices. Screens for FES and IFES occur according to the state procedures. Children are not served in more than one program of service at a time.

Requirements Specific to Part C

Evaluations for children were always multidimensional. Parents reported that services began without delay. And IFSPs were all in place by 45 days.

Again this year I found that families did not understand when Part C services ended and then what to expect from Part B services. Two out of three families were unsure when services would

end. Children are exited when they turn 3. One mother said that she thought she had been given that information. Transition goals were in place as needed. Families had a hard time telling me the differences in Part C and Part B services. So I am repeating my suggestion from last year that you internally brainstorm ways in which to improve in this area.

Requirements Specific to IFES

Appropriate children are served in this program until the age of 22; families all knew this age for transition. Transition goals were occurring for the individual about to age out of this service. Services are not duplicated with other waiver or child and family services. There was at least monthly contacts with each family.

Habilitation goals were implemented in 2 out of the 3 families that I visited as planned. The third child was in a respite home and had a lot of turmoil - they had moved and the parents were off and on again separating and the natural family who was expecting a new baby any day was considering foster placement. This situation was quite challenging and the FSS thought the goal should be redone, but was currently involved in a lot of day to day crisis management.

NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

STEP received another 3 year accreditation! Accreditation found strengths in STEP's safety assessment for people living in the community, the dedication and caring staff, lifespan respite as a true collaboration among community agencies and a high satisfaction from all stakeholders! While many areas did not have any recommendations some of their recommendations included broadening the accessibility plan, adding fire extinguishers and first aid kits to vehicles, self assessment of safety issues, annual performance reviews of all staff, the inclusion of cultural/ethnicity items on assessments and improvements to the outcome measurement systems.

CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

The Family Satisfaction Survey shows very high levels of satisfaction in all areas. MSU-B conducted phone interviews with 212 families

98% rated the FSS's respect of their families values and culture as good or excellent.
97% rated their FSS's desire to listen to their concerns as good to excellent.
97% rated the information and support received when there was changes in their life as good to excellent.
97% rated the location and time of the meeting with their FSS as convenient or very convenient.

89% felt they were well informed or informed about STEP's grievance procedures.
88% felt their respite funding was adequate or very adequate.
93% were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they received from STEP.

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL PARENT REPRESENTATIVE INPUT

The parent representative did not share any concerns about services with me.

INTERNAL EVALUATION

STEP's fiscal year 2003 annual report to the board reported objective completion for child and family services to be at 97%, and increase of 2%.

CONTACT DOCUMENTATION

Our office has not had parents contacting us during the last 12 months. I believe this means that families are able to directly communicate with the corporation when needed and don't feel the need to go outside the internal agency procedures.

LICENSING INFORMATION

While STEP is now a child placement agency and recruits, trains and matches children with families, they do not license these foster homes. All STEP's foster homes are licensed by Child and Family Services.

FINANCIAL AUDITS

DDP received STEP's Year End Financial Reports on 9/29/03 for fiscal year ending on 6/30/03. There were no issues nor problems noted with their financial report. On Oct. 29, 2003, DPHHS issued their desk review of STEP's Independent Audit Report for FY 03. The desk review revealed that the audit was acceptable and that there were no material findings nor questionable costs.

FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION

All of the FSS's that I did home visits with have current certifications.

CRISIS RESPONSE INFORMATION

A strength of your systems is evaluating what each family truly needs which allows you to utilize resources to best meet the needs of all families within the Region. Your commitment to brainstorm and find creative ways to address crisis needs of families is commendable. As a result of this planning and hard work, we do not see families in crisis without some limited resources or assistance.

OTHER

STEP does many activities that exemplify best practices that this review does not look at. "Sibs Day" is a wonderful way to include and recognize the involvement of the siblings! The agency wide picnic in the park is a fun filled event to bring families, people in services and staff together. There are luncheons for moms to encourage sharing and brainstorming among the moms. The annual stress workshop for families, staff and others is another outstanding event that STEP organizes. STEP completed over 40 child find activities in 11 counties during fy03!! STEP is heading a pilot project to develop Life Span Respite as a statewide model of cooperation across agencies that utilize respite for a range of populations from the elderly to families at risk for abuse! STEP has also received a grant to teach self advocacy. And, the newsletter is nicely done and very informative. And empathy training was completed at several local sites. Agency vehicles are now available in the outlying areas. Public service announcements have been run.

CONCLUSION

STEP's family services do an excellent job of meeting the state and federal requirements. I see the services as going way beyond the minimal requirements and am pleased with the strength of services are able to provide to individuals across their lifetime. Our office is also very appreciative of the collaborative nature of our relationship with STEP's child and family staff. It is nice that we are able to talk and work together on issues of mutual concern. And thanks again for your assistance and time in helping complete this review.

Copies to Gary Pagnotta
 Tim Plaska
 Judy LaRoux
 John Zeeck

